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ABSTRACT

Any university or college department that is conducting a self-study (self-evaluation) must do so in an organized and open-minded fashion. Too often persons can delude themselves into believing that they are conducting self-analysis when they are actually engaging in self-congratulations or conducting a disorganized search that will lead to dubious conclusions. A self-study can be conducted in an organized fashion by using a modified model for organizational communication developed by Sanford, Hunt, and Bracey. When applied to college departments, this model of organizational communication can generate questions concerning (1) the department's external environmental influences (managerial philosophy, cultural conditions, economic conditions), (2) internal organization elements (organizational objectives, organizational structure, technology, reward system, intergroup relations, the individual), (3) organizational communications systems (effective decision making, communication climate, interpersonal skills), and (4) organizational effectiveness (goal attainment, satisfaction, and development). (HOD)

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The Self Study
at the the University and at the Small College:
A Comparison

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The Self Study
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The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, it will attempt to pinpoint differing characteristics of self studies in small colleges and large university departments; and second, this paper will also provide useful points for consideration when we engage in self evaluations.

I have recently participated in self studies in both a small and a large department, and thus I felt qualified to tackle these rather formible topics. However, after deliberation, I concluded that the differences between the two types of institutional self studies which I had originally perceived as profound, are not, in fact, nearly as vast as I had originally supposed. It is quite difficult, for instance, to draw clear distinctions or even to generalize about departments, and subsequently, self studies. After all, one can find many "small" departments in large universities, while locating many "large" departments in small colleges. Also, as most of you know, the size of the department can be deceptive. Frequently, small communication departments provide service to a larger number of students than many other departments. I could go on, only to further substantiate the difficulty of making clear distinctions between characteristics of departments in colleges and universities, and their respective self studies. Nevertheless, with that massive disclaimer stated, I continue with some apparent observations which may generate useful concerns when approaching the complicated task of self evaluation.

Before doing so, however, I would like to point out two general

points about self evaluations. First, any department conducting a self study must do so in an organized and open minded fashion. Too often, persons can delude themselves into believing that they are conducting self analysis, when they are actually engaging in self congratulations and/or conducting a disorganized search which will lead to dubious conclusions at best. Granted, it is difficult to decide where or how to begin and organize a self study. Hopefully, this paper may provide some order to this chaotic job.

The second point to remember is that a self study is multi-purposed. It is a means of self reflection, a way to see what we do well, a way to see if changes are necessary, what those changes should be and how to bring them about. But, a self study is also persuasive. It is used to show to others that a department is innovative, effective, and carries its weight on campus. The self study provides evidence that departmental activities are consistent with school policy and future aspirations, while it persuades others that the department provides an excellent product for the dollars spent. It is difficult, sometimes, to reconcile the thought provoking soul searching elements of the self study with the pragmatic survival elements. Unfortunately, sometimes, the genuine self analytical side of the study can become secondary to the justification and self congratulation side.

To help us to look at the self study in an organized fashion, I have selected a modified model for organizational communication by Sanford, Hunt, and Bracey, which will be used to generate questions which a thorough self study should attempt to answer if it is to produce useful information, innovative change, and meet its ethical responsibilities. Likewise, the model helps indicate some differences

between self studies in smaller and larger institutions.

The model is obviously an expression of the systems approach to communication, an approach which can be beneficial to use when approaching self studies. Communication departments, like other organizations, are manmade systems which interact with other systems and with their total environment. The organization, according to the systems approach, is an open, sociotechnical system composed of a number of subsystems andⁱⁿ continuing interaction with its environmental suprasystem. Essentially, the systems approach means twothings. One is that the organization itself is a system--a set of interrelated elements. That is, organizations are complex wholes made up of many different parts that fit together and effect each in some way. The second idea is that organizations are "open systems." This means simply that organizations do not exists in isolation, they are a part of some larger system that effects them and is, in turn, affected by them. With this review of the systems approach in hand, let's look at the enclosed model and see what questions it generates for self studies.

First, let's look at external environmental influences, which are defined broadly as the surroundings in which an organization functions and which have an impact upon it. Remember, organizations, even communication departments, do not exist in isolation. They function in a larger college or university setting and in a still larger cultural and societal setting which must influence internal activities.

The initial component of the external environment influences is listed as the managerial philosophy and assumptions. These are basic influences on actions that determine how the organization

operates. They are the basic values, educational philosophies, beliefs about people and management which result in specific actions in the organization. The managerial philosophy and assumptions are considered an external environmental factor for two reasons: first, managerial philosophy and assumptions are only more specific forms of the general sociocultural values that surround the organization, and second, managerial philosophy and assumptions are basic components that shape the character of the more specific internal elements of the organization.

The following questions may result from looking at managerial philosophy and assumptions:

1. Does your institution have a specific mission and what impact should this mission have on your department? To answer this question, you need to identify what educational and societal assumptions are incorporated within the defined mission. For instance, what does it mean to be a liberal arts college? How does communication fit into a liberal arts tradition as defined by your institution? In larger university systems, the issue of mission and external philosophy can become incredibly complicated because of the nature of complex organizations. For instance, the Wisconsin system, like others nationally, has designated unique missions for each university in the system in an attempt to avoid costly duplication of programs and to take advantage of specific needs of geographical areas. So, U-W Whitewater has an environmental mission, U-W Parkside has an industrial mission, while U-W Milwaukee has an urban mission. Within these somewhat loosely defined missions are built-in concerns for a departmental self study. Many times, it is somewhat difficult to reconcile faculty and student needs and desires with externally imposed missions. However, all institutions have them, and thus,

for a self study to be informative and persuasive, it must consider the impact of externally imposed missions.

Aside from discussing the implications of the mission, a department should also ask:

2. What other philosophical assumptions have an effect on the department? This question leads to an analysis of other organizations, an analysis which is especially important for communication considering its diversity. After all, rarely do communication departments operate on their own; instead, they frequently find themselves associating with a variety of departments and disciplines. For instance, at U-W Parkside, part of the department was located in the division of humanities while another part was located in the division of fine arts. Each division had its own philosophy, expectations, and ways of doing things. This confusing organization and its implications became a major focal point of our self study. It is important to clearly understand the mission of the institution, the requirements of the institution, and the external organizational restraints to best decide what departments are capable of realistically doing and what programs can best fulfill the needs of the institution at large.

In conjunction with these broader issues, we must also ask:

3. What are the roles of research, teaching, institutional and community service in the system and institution? Larger universities, of course, often see themselves primarily as generators of knowledge, and protestations to the contrary, they often see themselves as teaching institutions secondarily. It is imperative for a department to clearly understand the impact of institutional assumptions concerning the roles of teaching and research if they are to have a useful and persuasive self study.

Another question which needs to be addressed under the broad heading of managerial philosophy and assumptions is: 4. How do the institution and system view its role in relationship to the larger community? This issue is very important for communication departments because we have traditionally participated actively in community activities such as theatrical productions, speakers bureaus, internships, consulting work, etc. Does the institution foster and encourage this type of activity? How does the institution view this type of productivity in relationship to teaching and research? Such questions may ultimately lead to your reevaluating the speakers bureau program or other activities which take valuable time and energy. As a footnote, most institutions give enthusiastic lip service to these types of activities, but often react to them in far from enthusiastic ways. It is imperative for a department to realistically evaluate how the institutions evaluate activities. Only then can we avoid the all too frequent instances where a two page article written by a philosophy professor is considered more significant than developing a speakers bureau or directing two mainstage productions.

These four broad questions will, of course, lead to many more. The important thing to realize is that we do not exist in isolation, and thus, for us to reach realistic conclusions about ourselves, we must have ways of getting to the managerial philosophy and assumptions of those larger environments in which we function.

The second category of external environmental influences is cultural considerations which refer broadly to a way of life, including such things as knowledge, beliefs, values, customs and socially prescribed roles. Cultural considerations influence what we do in

the classroom, what technologies we use and what specific objectives are sought. A number of questions arise when considering the cultural impact on our departments:

1. What fundamental shifts in culture do we see that might effect our program?
2. What developments in the field of communication studies do we see occurring and what impact should they have on our program?
3. Can we realistically predict both cultural and communication trends in order to make long range changes?
4. Which of these changes do we want to incorporate into our program?

We are all aware of the cry from students that communication programs should prepare them for jobs after graduation. How much do we need to investigate trends in the job market and groom our program to those trends? What impact do shifts in population to the West and Sunbelt have on our program? Many smaller colleges in the Midwest tend to rely primarily for their students on a relatively limited area. Perhaps, considering the population trends, smaller departments may have to consider redesigning their programs to draw students nationally. Shifting roles of women and other minorities as well as political and economic changes should be considered and may, in fact, influence the types of programs we wish to institute or the type of students we hope to draw to our program. I am not proposing that communication departments jump on every new bandwagon which society or academia proclaims. Communication departments have been accused ~~and~~, often rightfully so, of being the Sir Fopling Flutter of academia. Similar to Sir Fopling, we

search out new trends, learn the vocabulary and little else, and then pass ourselves off as experts to our students and to each other. Often times, it is tempting to follow this road to popularity and prestige. Many times, it means increased enrollments as well as increased and confusing vocabularies. It is imperative, however, for departments to keep abreast of what other departments are doing to make intelligent decisions of their own.

The final component under external environmental factors is the economic one. As you know, there have been massive cuts in educational support which has resulted in department cuts, redistributions, and eliminations in many larger institutions. The economic concerns effect both large and small institutions alike. The number of faculty, number of students, investment in technology, the type of program, etc. are all influenced by this single factor. Some questions which may arise out of considering the economic component:

1. Considering the economy, can we legitimately provide a broad based program? Or should we focus on a particular area of communication study and develop that?
2. Are we in an economic position to develop an area of communication which would require increased faculty and/or technology?
3. How many faculty can we realistically see in the department in the future?
4. Should we develop a program in which we can work more closely with other departments on campus so as to cut economic expenses?
5. Do we run an economic shop?

It is imperative when considering all areas of the external environment for a department to have the information available to

be able to make realistic predictions. Will there be changes in managerial philosophy and assumptions and what impact could these have on your department? What societal and academic changes are likely to effect your future? And finally, what impact do changing economic circumstances both nationally and institutionally have on your program? By addressing these broad issues, a department can avoid short sighted self studies which are wasteful and frequently, harmful to the department and the institution. The external environmental influences on organizations are not independent; they are interrelated. Managerial philosophy is greatly influenced by both cultural and economic conditions. Culture also influences what economic values and conditions tend to surround the organization. These three distinct, yet related, sets of factors interact to determine the internal makeup of the organization.

Now that we have looked briefly at external environmental factors, let's shift to discussing organizational effectiveness. The issue of effectiveness is an extremely important one for self studies as departments attempt to define what effectiveness is, while they evaluate past effectiveness and ways of becoming more effective in the future. The organizational model argues that organizations are effective to the degree that they achieve their objectives, satisfy the needs of members, and grow in their ability to continue to do both these things.

Under the broad issue of organizational objectives, a department may address the following questions:

1. What are our goals? Are they realistic?
- Do we have a sufficient number of students? Do we have a sufficient number of outstanding students? Do we adequately prepare our students for career opportunities? Do we generate sufficient and significant bodies of research? Do we introduce our students to a variety of

communication areas and perspectives? Do we have an effective means of evaluating whether we are achieving desired goals?

Goal attainment depends on the ability of the organization to produce the goods and services society expects it to produce. A department engaging in a self study must spend considerable time defining what it hopes to produce while candidly discussing how effective it has been in doing so.

The second criterion for organizational effectiveness is the degree to which members of the organization experience satisfaction from their association and their contributions to the attainment of organizational goals. Strictly speaking, satisfaction is a major determinant of the degree to which organizations achieve their goals. The first question which arises in this category is:

1. What are the various groups whose satisfaction should be our concern? The two most obvious groups are faculty and students, although there may be other groups depending on your school and department. Considering the two large groups of faculty and students, we might tackle the following questions:

2. Are faculty interests, talents, and training being utilized efficiently? Are the faculty in a rut? Are the faculty being challenged by the program? Are faculty required to spend too much time in less rewarding activities or activities which are perceived by others as trivial or of lesser significance? Do faculty actively participate in the decision making processes of the department? Do the faculty participate too much in the everyday operations of the department? Do faculty have adequate means for input in issues of concern to them such as course loads, schedules, etc.

It is important, if these questions are to be addressed honestly, for there to be an environment where faculty feel free to express

dissatisfaction without punishment. Sometimes, in both larger and smaller departments, differences between younger and often untenured faculty and older faculty become pronounced which, of course, hinders the free flow of information and opinions.

3. Are students and alumni satisfied with offerings and/or programs and/or faculty? Are there areas of study which students feel need more attention or less attention? Do alumni feel their education has prepared them adequately for jobs and the world outside? Obviously, in smaller schools, departments can more easily glean this information from their alumni. Do students and alumni feel that their needs and concerns are adequately addressed by the department? Are students involved or should they be involved in a variety of decisions made in the department?

The area of faculty, student and alumni satisfaction is multifaceted and complicated because it involves personalities, traditions, and a changing population. Consequently, many self studies avoid addressing this important concern.

The final area of interest under the heading of organizational effectiveness is development, which refers to changes in the organization's ability to achieve its goals. More specifically, development refers to changes in the organization's problem solving ability and to changes in its ability to respond to external and internal change. Often times, in addressing the development question, we look at the way conflict is handled, how planning takes place, the methods used to make decisions, and the communication climate. A few questions which may arise are:

1. Are there adequate mechanisms within the department to assure change and innovation? 2. Is there a philosophical management or personal force which negates positive growth? How can this be dealt

with constructively? Suppose, for instance, your small department has little chance of increase in faculty, yet you conclude that there are areas which need to be covered in your program. How can you handle these needed changes? Do you retrain a faculty member, decide you should only deal with those things you can currently handle, or do you solve the problem in a different way? In this instance, you are addressing the issue of your department's ability to develop.

Having looked ~~looked~~ at external environmental influences and organizational effectiveness, let's discuss quickly internal organizational elements and organizational communication system, realizing as the discussion continues, that all of these elements interact and influence each other as a system. The internal nature and characteristics of the organization are determined primarily by the three external environmental factors discussed. In turn, the internal characteristics have significant influences on the organization communication system and its effectiveness.

The first element of internal organization is organizational objectives. We need to ask:

1. What is our department's primary objective?
2. What is the objective of our self study?

The second element of internal organization is the organizational structure of the department. Lines of authority and authority relationships make up a large part of the design of the formal communication subsystem. However, an informal structure is always operating as well.

1. Where is the power in the department? Is this power appropriate? How are decisions made? Are there organizational cliques which are based on either philosophical or personal dif-

ferences? Some times, in larger diversified departments, philosophical differences within the department can have either positive or quite negative ramifications for the entire department. How can these differences be reconciled or how can they be used by the department in a positive way?

Often, departments engaging in self studies concentrate on issues of courses and programs while ignoring the opportunity to discuss the internal working structure of the department. Such discussions are imperative because decisions reached are connected with goals and the department's ability to achieve its goals.

Technology, the third element in internal organization, is an especially important consideration for communication departments because, often times, control of particular technologies influences courses, programs and goals of departments. Some questions which arise concerning the issue of technology are:

1. What technology do we need to fulfill our goals? Are these realistic needs or must we reappraise our goals considering availability of technology?
2. Are we effectively using the technologies we already have?
3. Is technology dictating our department decision?
4. Who or what agency has control of the technology?

Sometimes these last two issues can be very important. For instance, at U-W Parkside, we had a beautiful color TV facility which was controlled by the library which used it for the production of instructional media while seeing it as a teaching facility only secondarily. However, despite this organizational limitation imposed upon our department by the institution, we were pressured to use the facility which Wisconsin taxpayers had paid many dollars to install. Conflicts of control and philosophy became maddening until

the department in its self study decided that the facility should not dictate our programs.

The discussion of the reward system should deal with two primary issues:

1. How are faculty rewarded internally? What activities are rewarded and should other areas of productivity be looked at?

2. How are students rewarded in the department?

These two broad questions will undoubtedly lead to a thorough investigation of criteria for faculty productivity, grading scales, difficulty of courses, sequences of courses and how courses work together as integrated units.

Finally, a department should candidly look at intergroup relations, and address some of these questions:

1. How do the theatre and speech communication people relate in smaller combined departments? Is there a genuine overlap of philosophy and is this overlap adequately communicated to students and other faculty? Do you need to consider courses or program changes which emphasize or de-emphasize this overlap?

2. Are a variety of communication viewpoints represented in the department? Is there a climate of constructive interaction between them?

3. What relationship does your department have with other departments on campus. Do you adequately incorporate other department courses into department offerings? Are there attempts to avoid duplication of services? Often times, in larger institutions it is difficult to bridge departments because of strictly defined territories and departmental competition.

Finally, the department should explore the elements of organizational communication and feedback, and in doing so, it may address

the following questions:

1. What is the design of the formal subsystem and what impact does it have on department decision making?
2. What is the departmental communication climate? Is there a high level of trust, support and respect among people in the organization?
3. Do members of the department express their ideas clearly and actively listen to others?
4. And finally, are there open feedback channels for both faculty and students?

The questions which can be generated from applying this organizational communication model to a college or university self study are almost limitless. I have just begun to explore them in this paper. Unfortunately, I have seen that frequently departments fail to address even the most obvious of these significant issues. The reasons for this failure are many. There can be a lack of an organized approach, or an unclear idea of what a self study should do, or intimidation by fellow faculty or administration, or the fear that if too much is discussed, people may find out departmental weaknesses, or seeing a self study as a means to justify already decided upon changes. However, if a self study is to be effective and ethical, it must be organized, open minded, and conducted in an atmosphere of trust and concern for understanding how the department operates and what are the most effective means to function in a complex organizational structure whether it be a small college or a large university.

MODEL OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

